

From the Director

As more families move to West Michigan to call Ottawa County home, park usage continues to increase. Even post-pandemic, our community is opting outside. This shift outdoors hasn't gone unnoticed at the county or state level. In July, we were excited to welcome Governor Whitmer to Connor Bayou where she called for a \$150 million investment in local parks.

With all of this momentum it's easy to get excited about planning for the future, which was a significant focus of the last year. The Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission and staff completed three major planning projects:

2021 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan - Residents and park visitors helped build and guide this plan by completing surveys and directing comments and suggestions to the Parks & Recreation Commission. This plan ensures eligibility for grant funding from the State of Michigan and provides a road map for park and trail development.

Ottawa Sands Master Plan - Planning for the development of Ottawa Sands, an \$11.2 million property, was a major undertaking over a year in the making. We were proud to release a plan that balances both ecological restoration and recreation for all abilities. From day-use beach areas to yurts, this plan has something for everyone. It generated guite a bit of excitement and thanks to the Bill & Bea Idema Foundation, we received \$3.5 million in funding for the Idema Explorers Camp!

Grand River Identity Study - The intended focus of the project was to begin to create a 40-mile long classroom to engage and educate our community by developing a thematic interpretive plan for the Grand River Greenway. A crucial part of the story of the Grand River involves Native American history, so tribal citizens and their perspectives were an essential part of the team. The study was eye-opening in outlining the great potential for the Grand River Greenway to be a seminal feature for our community.

In addition to planning for the property under our purview, we also applied for and received two grants to expand nature programming in our community. These grants will support us in developing a pilot program for fourth grade students, Parks for All, as well as the creation of new art and virtual programming.

We are so excited for the future of Ottawa County Parks & Recreation!

> Jason D. Shamblin, Director Ottawa County Parks & Recreation







Property Data





4-6

7-8

10

16

11-13

At-a-Glance

7,257
ACRES

28 COUNTY PARKS

12 OPEN SPACES

150+
MILES OF TRAIL

The Parks & Recreation
Commission also oversees
management of the portion of the
Musketawa Trail, located in Ottawa
County, under an agreement with
the Michigan Department of
Natural Resources and a portion of
the Spoonville Trail in partnership
with Crockery Township.

See page 16 for a listing of all lands administered by the Parks Commission.



Where you belong

Ottawa County is blessed with a natural resource base as extensive as any other county in the state. The Lake Michigan shoreline, sand dune formations, waterways, wetlands, bayous, and woodlands all contribute to make Ottawa County a very special environment. These resources have the potential to support many healthy outdoor recreation activities.

Ottawa County is also the fastest growing county in the state, which is a reflection of the area's unique natural attractions, diverse economy, and other indicators of a high quality of life.

Greenways in Ottawa County

There are four greenways in Ottawa County, each different and special in its own way:

- Grand River Greenway
- Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway
- Macatawa River Greenway
- Pigeon River Greenway

What is a greenway?

A greenway is a connected and ecologically related corridor of park or protected green spaces near an urban area, set aside for recreational use or environmental protection.



Lake Michigan Greenway

Ottawa Sands Master Plan

Over a year in the making, the Ottawa Sands County Park Master Plan was formally accepted by the Parks & Recreation Commission in December 2020.



Idema Explorers Camp

Thanks to the Idema Family, funding was committed to the future development of the Explorers Camp at Ottawa Sands. The camping area will include yurts and a treehouse village, offering a low-impact experience that can't be found anywhere else in West Michigan!



Volunteer clean-up at the Sag

In the spring, four groups of volunteers planted 500 native plants along the Grand River shoreline at Ottawa Sands to replace the invasive honeysuckle that was removed in 2020.

Thank you to volunteers from Grand Haven Christian School, Walden Green Montessori, the Park Stewards program, and Adopt-a-Park partner, GHSP.



Day-Use Area

Grants will be submitted in 2022 to assist with funding additional recreational improvements that would greatly enhance access to the park for people of all abilities. These projects include a day-use parking area with ADA parking spaces, a modern accessible restroom facility, a bike/pedestrian linkage into Ottawa Sands, and a 1.6-miles accessible loop around the 80-acre inland lake.





Lake Michigan Greenway

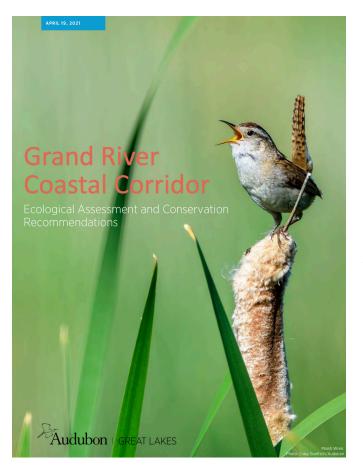
Ecological Restoration

Thanks in part to the Grand River Coastal Corridor assessment, conducted by Audubon Great Lakes, they were awarded a \$400,000 Sustain Our Great Lakes (SOGL) grant for two years of wetland creation and restoration at Ottawa Sands, as well as wetland protection at Stearns Creek Park. The \$400,000 will be matched by Ottawa County Parks & Recreation through the millage and other grants, totalling nearly \$800,000 in wetland improvement.

Efforts continued to secure funding for shoreline and wetland creation. Recently a pre-proposal for a Sustain Our Great Lakes grant submitted by the Great Lakes Office of National Audobon was accepted.



"The corridor is recognized as one of the richest areas in the state for species of greatest conservation concern and biodiversity, is a focal area for Lake Michigan fisheries restoration, is above-average for climate resiliency, and lies along a globally recognized Important Bird Area."



Grand River Coastal Corridor Ecological Assessment by the Audubon Great Lakes

Report serves as guiding document to:

- 1. Improve ecosystems integrity
- 2. Enhance quality of life
- 3. Increase the economic value of the protected resource
- Provide basis for seeking landscape-scale grant funding
- 5. Help establish the area as a national ecotourism destination

Assessment Recommendations

- Establish a collaborative group to address corridor-wide issues
- Develop a "Conservation Action Plan"
- Fills gaps in current watershed management plan
- Define and prioritize ecosystem creation, restoration, and enhancement areas
- Identify specific vegetation and wildlife management strategies
- Support water quality management strategies of stakeholders
- Green stormwater infrastructure
- Systemic monitoring of bird activity
- Seek higher level protections for key properties where possible
- Create outreach strategies to educate the public about the corridor

Lake Michigan Greenway

Improved Accessibility

A brand new play structure was constructed in the spring at North Beach Park, just in time for summer beach-goers.

Thanks to a generous donation from the Angela Schipper Fund to the Ottawa County Parks Foundation, North Beach Park now has an accessible swing. Kathy Schipper started the fund in honor of her daughter, Angela, who was born with special needs. One of Angela's favorite activities was to swing.



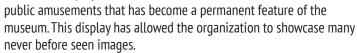
"It was a great gift to our family to have a playground near our home that both Angela and her siblings could all enjoy. This spring I saw that an upgrade in the playground was being planned and thought it would be the great opportunity to honor Angela and donate a swing for children with special needs. I am very excited to know that families with special needs children will feel welcomed and can enjoy playtime at the beach for years to come."

Kathy Schipper

Historic Ottawa Beach

The Pump House Museum and Learning Center, operated by the Historic Beach Society, had another excellent year. Their exhibits featuring Lakewood Farm and Jenison Electric Park were the catalyst for a number of exciting opportunities.

A \$8,250 grant from the Community Enhancement Program of the Macatawa Area Coordinating Council supported the development of a touch screen digital interactive display about Holland's earliest



The Lakewood Farm in Holland, formerly owned by Chicago coal executive George F. Getz, was recently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The property was nominated for this honor by the Historic Ottawa Beach Society, with the help of local historian and exhibit designer Valerie van Heest.

They also continued a partnership with the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District to develop summer camp opportunities.



Photos courtesy of the Historic Ottawa Beach Society

Lakeshore Cleanup Coalition

In a collaborative effort to manage debris on our beaches, Ottawa County Parks & Recreation formed a partnership with the Macatawa Area Coordinating Council and five other West Michigan partners to formally create the Lakeshore Cleanup Coalition. This group hosted clean up events throughout the county and community members assisted with debris removal. Through these efforts, the Beach Buddies program was born!









Grand River Greenway

Idema Explorers Trail

Although no new segments of the Idema Explorers Trail were constructed in 2021, significant progress was made in the planning and design of several segments of the greenway trail.

Stearns Bayou Connector

Finalized 17 easements and completed environmental, historical, and initial construction plan reviews

Bass River

Acquired a 48-acre property adjacent to the Bass River State Recreation Area for trail route and conservation purposes

Allendale

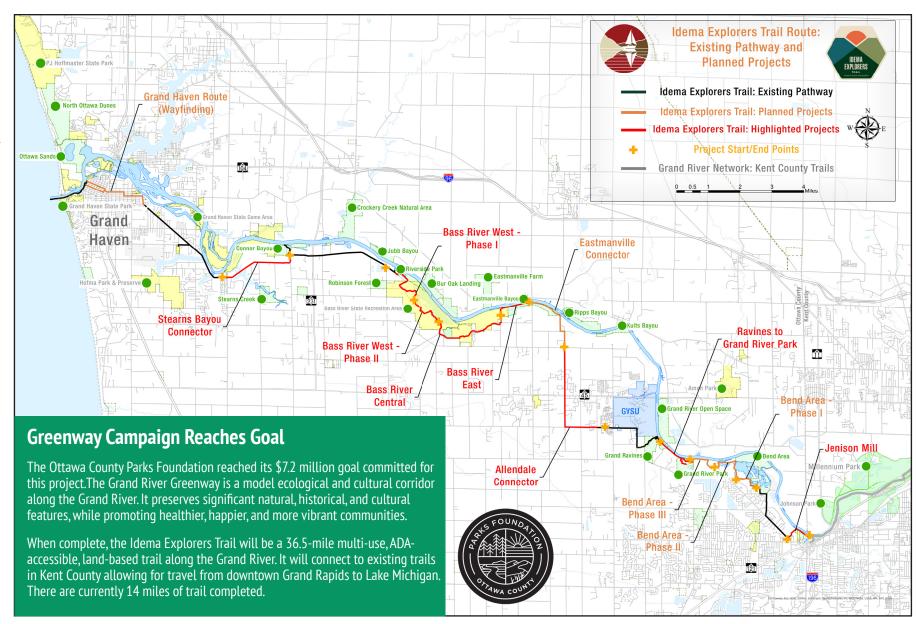
Initiated discussions with Allendale Township and MDOT for an improved trail crossing of M-45 (Lake Michigan Drive)

Grand Ravines to Grand River Park

Secured two large riverfront easements and completed construction plans for this 1.6 mile segment (currently under construction)

Jenison Mill

Completed construction plans and secured permits for this one-mile long segment of paved trail and boardwalk including a bridge over Rush Creek (currently under construction)



Grand River Greenway

Prescribed Fires

The droughts in 2021 made for a challenging, yet effective, burn season. Due to extremely dry weather, it was difficult to get safe conditions that met the fires' "prescription." Eventually, staff were able to conduct burns at Eastmanville Farm and Hiawatha Forest. A contractor did a highly technical burn at Stearns Creek Park.



Restoring Riparian Buffer

The first year of maintenance after a restoration planting is the most important. At Eastmanville Farm, where 52 acres are being restored to native ecosystems, staff prevented weeds from spreading seed by regular mowing. Also, the tree seedlings planted in the floodplain were monitored for survival. Despite the difficult year of drought, the majority survived their first year.





Volunteers plant large bur oaks to jump start the Bur Oak Plains

Restoration Education

Restoration strategies can be complex, sometimes they can seem counterintuitive. Why would a Parks Department use fire to manage property? Isn't that destructive?

Questions like these are legitimate and we work hard to be able to answer them in a way that makes sense. Video has been an incredibly helpful tool. In partnership with mi EcoBUZZ, we tackled the explanation of prescribed fire, and riparian buffer restoration.



Learn more: news.miottawa.org/prescribed-fire



Learn more: news.miottawa.org/efarm-restoration

Special Events

Bend Area Dedication

Over the summer, the Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission celebrated the acquisition of 149 acres of land and site improvements at Bend Area Open Space in Jenison, as well as the completion of the Georgetown segment of the Idema Explorers Trail. Prior to the event, we were thankful to have the help of many volunteers who helped clean up the property!

The Bend Area Open Space is not well-known yet, and even though it will be a large project for us, we haven't been quite ready to promote it. Now, with the added land, development of a preliminary hiking trail system, and the connection with the Idema Explorers Trail, we hope people will check it out and get a sense of its potential.



New at the site is a 4-mile, marked hiking trail system, with a trailloop along the Grand River.

In addition to Ottawa County Parks millage funding, this expansion was made possible by a grant from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, as well as funding from the Ottawa County Parks Foundation's Grand River Greenway Campaign.

Public Observatory Groundbreaking

On September 11, members of the Parks Commission, Parks Foundation, Friends of Ottawa County Parks, and the Shoreline Amateur Astronomical Association (SAAA) gathered to celebrate the groundbreaking of the first public observatory in West Michigan at Hemlock Crossing County Park.



The SAAA raised \$75,000 for the building and a 16" Meade telescope. We anticipate that the observatory will open in 2022.

Governor's Urges Investment in Parks and Trails

On Tuesday, July 6, Governor Gretchen Whitmer visited Connor Bayou Park to propose spending \$150 million in federal relief money on locally owned parks and trails.

The new proposal is in addition to the \$250 million that Whitmer proposed to spend on parks and trails that the state manages.

As residents recognized during the pandemic when they flocked to our parks, natural spaces aren't a luxury, but a necessity for our wellbeing. The cost of acquiring natural spaces, designing, permitting, park infrastructure, and maintaining these facilities is consistently increasing.

"Over the last five years, the average of development grant applications to the DNR for three primary grant programs – the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, Recreation Passport Grants and Land and Water Conservation Fund – has approached \$40 million annually. Nearly \$20 million of those annual requests could not be met because of lack of available funding."

Governor Gretcher Whitmer



Education Grants

Arts in the Parks

With a \$33,500 Mellon Foundation Grant, Arts in the Parks for Holland forged a partnership between Hope College, Ottawa County Parks & Recreation, and the greater Hollandarea. The partnership created programming for people of all backgrounds and identities to pursue the connections between nature and artistic expression, with an explicit aim to reach under-served communities.





In the first phase the project, the team gathered data to help inform how best to provide programs, events, or exhibits. This project was designed to build lasting relationships in the community.

We were excited to work with community partners to build fresh, inclusive programs combining both nature and art!







Expanding Nature Access

With a recently awarded grant of \$35,000 from the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation, Ottawa County Parks & Recreation was able to expand nature education in our community.

Permanent Virtual Programming

During the pandemic, Parks staff began to create virtual programming—while the Nature Center and other facilities were closed due to COVID—and found significant demand for this resource.

Parks for All Pilot

We believe it is vital for students to attend a parks program at least once in their school career. The goal of Parks for All is to fully fund the cost for every fourth-grade student within the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District to attend one program annually.

Before we further develop this initiative, we will conduct a pilot program to fund transportation and program costs for 1,000 fourth graders in northern Ottawa County in 2022.





Generous donors who have contributed to the Emilie Baker Fund for the Environment, GHACF Environment Fund, Mary Ann Sherwood Families & Children Fund, and the William T. and Shirley A. Baker Family Fund at the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation made this funding available to benefit the community.

Community Engagement

Step it Up

The 2021 Step It Up! Fitness Challenge & Adventure Series kicked off in May. The free, 8-week program offers group walks, an adventure series, weekly strength training, healthy eating and mental health tips, and provides accountability with physical



activity goal setting and reporting. Through these program offerings, the goal is to get community members active, visiting new parks, exercising outdoors more frequently, and improving their overall health.

Velo Kids

Through a partnership with Velo Kids, we were able to offer cycling summer camps for ages 7-12. Velo Kids also hosted Pedal the Pigeon, a kids only mountain bike race at Pigeon Creek Park.



Spokes Fighting Strokes

Dan Zimmerman shared how he changes lives across the nation with recumbent trikes, a dose of inspiration, and a trike ride. Following our speakers, local stroke survivors were able to test out a trike. We wrapped up with a ride along the Idema Explorers Trail.



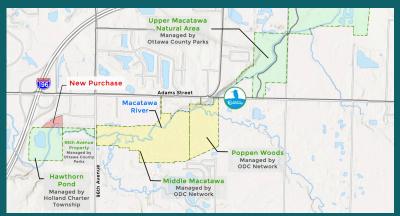
"I was the only one in a wheelchair and there were lots of people there. After listening to Dan talk I was really enthused. Dan put me on the trike and I took off right away. I had a great big smile on my face. And I rode all the way up and around the loop."

Rick Kritzman

Connecting Communities along the Macatawa River Greenway

A key parcel near Hawthorn Pond Natural Area was purchased this spring. The property is only 5.5 acres, but it provided the final connection needed from Hawthorn Pond to 96th Avenue, making any future trail connection much more feasible.





A group of partners, including Ottawa County Parks, Holland Charter Township, ODC Network, and other local municipalities have been working for several decades to protect and connect land along the Macatawa River to create the Macatawa Greenway. Now that the core land acquisitions for this section of the Greenway are completed, a collaborative team is reviewing the best options for providing public access for this section.



Community Engagement

StoryWalks®

We were thrilled to expand a partnership with local libraries to provide StoryWalks to families throughout Ottawa County.

Parks provide the paths and libraries provide the pages for an engaging stroll at a variety of parks in all seasons. Thank you to our local libraries for making StoryWalk possible.



Volunteers

Volunteers continue to be the heart of stewardship efforts by Ottawa County Parks & Recreation. Humans are an active member of our local ecosystem and our team of 700 amazing volunteers spent over 6,000 hours helping us improve our conservation efforts in the last year.







Grand Haven Area Community Foundation

50 years of support and counting!

The Grand Haven Area Community Foundation (GHACF) celebrated its 50th anniversary with a series of activities designed to engage and give back to the community. They kicked off the slate of activities with a volunteer event, the Day of Giving Back, on May 18, 2021.



Over 50 volunteers helped maintain gardens, trails, and natural habitats at Ottawa Sands, Rosy Mound Natural Area, and Grand Haven Township's Duncan Woods and painted the pump house at Grand Haven's iconic Musical Fountain.

"We are fortunate to have so many wonderful parks and trails in our community. From beachfront parks to wooded trails, there really is something for everyone." — GHACF President Hadley Streng



Community Engagement

Beach Buddies

Booths at Tunnel, Kirk, and North Beach Parks were outfitted with materials for summer visitors to become a Beach Buddy during their visit. Participants were able to simply request a Beach Buddy bucket and pick up trash that they found on the beach. This program was offered in partnership with the Lakeshore Clean Up Coalition.

Trash Free Waters

Funding for this program came from an EPA Trash Free Waters grant that was awarded to the Macatawa Area Coordinating Council to support beach and river cleanups in Ottawa and Allegan Counties. Through this funding, the Lakeshore Clean Up Coalition and volunteers spent over 800 hours collecting 1,400 pounds of trash from public beaches and river access sites.





BioBlitz

Beginning before the crack of dawn, scientists and the public scoured Riverside Park to document as many species as possible in one day as part of Ottawa County Parks first Bioblitz. Over 330 species of fish, turtles, macroinvertebrates, plants, frogs, fungus, mussels, birds and mammals were reported by over 100 participates. The Bioblitz was made possible thanks to the support of a dozen partner organizations.

What's a BioBlitz?

A BioBlitz is an event that focuses on finding and identifying as many species as possible in a specific area over a short period of time.

At a BioBlitz, scientists, families, students, teachers, and other community members work together to get a snapshot of an area's biodiversity.



Escape Career Connection

Ottawa County Parks & Recreation has supported ESCAPE's Career Connections program since 2014. One of the goals of the program includes connecting young people with potential careers, which is why we got involved. We were happy to be able to give kids who live in the city an opportunity to work outside while learning from our maintenance, operations, and natural resources management staff.

This year's team assisted with trimming trails, removing invasive species, picking up litter, and other maintenance at Paw Paw Park, Riley Trails, and Historic Ottawa Beach Parks.

Although most of the team had little to no experience working in the outdoors, they powered through the heat, mosquitoes, and other challenges of park work. Motivational leaders fostered good work ethic and an appreciation for these important public spaces.



Supporting Organizations

Ottawa County Parks Foundation

In its fifth year, the Ottawa County Parks Foundation committed to supporting nature education programs, in addition to land acquisition and special park projects! The Ottawa County Parks Nature Center opened in 2010 to provide and enhance nature education opportunities. Donors in our community supported this endeavor, raising over \$400,000 of the \$1.8 million needed to construct the facility. That investment continues to pay off year after year and serves as a shining example of private funds leveraging millage dollars for public benefit.

Ten years later, nature education and community engagement are more important than ever. Studies continue to show that nature and outdoor recreation make us happier and healthier. Unsurprisingly, adults introduced to the outdoors as children were more likely to participate in outdoor activities as adults than those not exposed to the

Since first opening its doors, attendance at the Ottawa County Parks Nature Center has nearly doubled and the need for expanded educational programming is clear. We are grateful for the support of the Parks Foundation as we continue to provide programs for people of all ages in West Michigan.

outdoors as children.

Learn more: ottawacountyparksfoundation.org







Parks Foundation Bobbi Jones-Sabine speaking at *Breakfast* at the Park, the organization's annual fundraising event

Friends of Ottawa County Parks

The Friends of Ottawa County Parks (FOOCP) is a membership-based organization that supports the parks through stewardship and monitoring, as well as community outreach.

Students from the Natural Resources Management program at Grand Valley State University, under the direction of Dr. Alexandra Locher, provided a great service to Ottawa County Parks & Recreation by surveying the health of pine plantations at Pigeon Creek Park and Open Space. Thanks to a Statema Stewardship grant from the Friends of Ottawa County Parks, three students received a stipend to write a report with their findings and recommendations for future management.

Learn more: friendsofocp.org



Friends Board Members and volunteers support parks in so many ways!



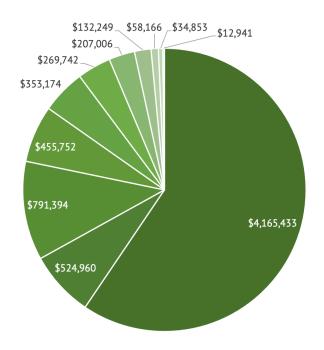






Revenue & Expenses

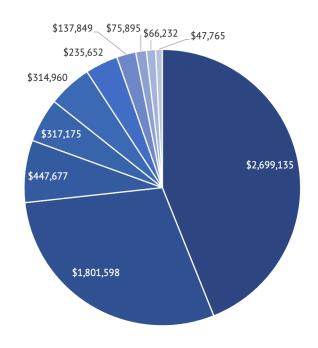
FY 2021 Revenue = \$7,005,669



- Millage-\$4,165,433
- Motor Vehicle Permits-\$455,752
- Facility Reservations-\$207,006
- Nature Center-\$34,853

- Other*-\$54,960
- Other Financing Services**-\$353,174
- Ottawa Beach Marina-\$132,249
- Grand Ravines Dog Park-\$12,941
- Grants-\$791,394
- Ottawa County Parks Foundation-\$269,742
- Pigeon Creek Winter Operations-\$58,166

FY 2021 Expenses = \$6,143,938

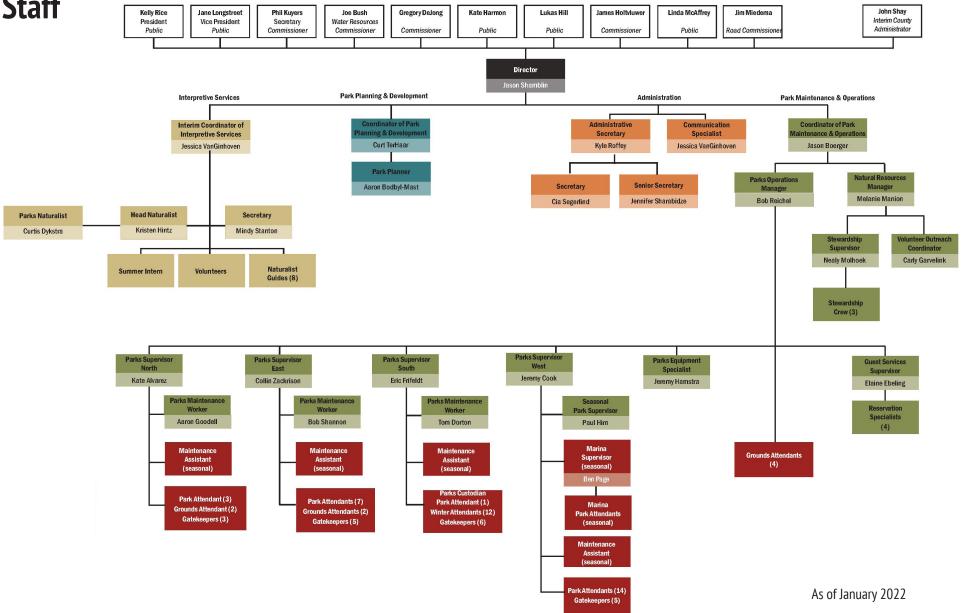


- Salaries-\$2,699,135
- Maintenance + Repair-\$317,175
- Utilities-\$137.849
- Bond-\$47,765

- Capital Outlay-\$1,801,598
- Supplies-\$314,960
- Contracted Services-\$75.895
- Indirect***-\$447,677
- Operations-\$235,652
- Insurance-\$66.232

*Other - Reimbursements, donations, Grand River Greenway, hunting fees, oil revenue, interest on investment **Other Financing Services - In-kind Admin/IT services from Ottawa County ***Indirect - Admin/IT services from Ottawa County + additional IT service charge

Board & Staff



Property Data

Parks and Open Spaces	Acreage	Lake Michigan Frontage (feet)	River Frontage (Grand River, Pigeon & Macatawa) (feet)	Bayou & Inland Lake Frontage (feet)
Count Birray Conservation				
Grand River Greenway	440			0.040
Stearns Creek	118	0	0	6,213
Connor Bayou	142	0	4,563	1,687
Crockery Creek Natural Area	334	0	2,640	0
Jubb Bayou (Open Space)	97	0	4,589	4,026
Riverside Park	95	0	6,737	0
Bur Oak Landing (Open Space)	263 47	0	7,392	5,267
Bass River Open Space	100	0	0	3,090
Eastmanville Farm	229	0	1,365	0
Eastmanville Bayou Open Space	157	0	9,364	8,300
Deer Creek Park	2	0	530	0
Ripps Bayou (Open Space)	173.0	0	7,550	7,992
Kuits Bayou (Open Space)	80	0	6,191	2,650
Grand River Open Space	279	0	7,890	0
Grand River Ravines	202	0	2,640	0
Grand River Park	162	0	2,505	0
Bend Area (Open Space)	421	0	10,032	33,263
Un-named Site - Georgetown Township	30	0	1,267 75,255	0 72,488
Pierre Pierre Constitution	2,831.7	U	75,255	12,488
Pigeon River Greenway	000	0	7.000	0
Hemlock Crossing/Pine Bend	239	0	7,920	0
Pigeon River Open Space	46	0	2,354	0
Pigeon Creek Park	282	0	3,200	0
Pigeon Creek Forest (Open Space)	130	0	0 42 474	0
	697	0	13,474	0

Parks and Open Spaces	Acreage	Lake Michigan Frontage (feet)	Frontage (Grand River, Pigeon & Macatawa) (feet)	Bayou & Inland Lake Frontage (feet)
Macatawa River Greenway				
Paw Paw Park	172	0	6,878	0
Adams Street Landing	10	0	1,100	0
Hawthorn Pond	40	0	1,792	0
Other Macatawa Property	10	0	1,994	
Upper Macatawa Natural Area	612	0	13,100	0
	844	0	24,864	0
Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway				
North Ottawa Dunes	593	0	0	0
Ottawa Sands	345	0	5,740	8,400
North Beach Park	7	745	0	0
Rosy Mound Natural Area	164	3,450	0	0
Kirk Park	68	1,850	0	0
Olive Shores	21.0	738	0	0
Tunnel Park	23.0	950	0	0
Historic Ottawa Beach Parks	58	756	0	2,560
	1,279	8,489	5,740	10,960
General Parks, Open Space and Trails				-
Musketawa Trail	NA	0	0	0
Conklin Trailhead	0	0	0	0
Marne Trailhead	0	0	0	0
Un-named Site - Wright Township	8	0	0	0
Grose Park	40	0	0	823
Marne Bog (Open Space)	83	0	0	0
Robinson Forest (Open Space)	80	0	0	0
Johnson Street Forest (Open Space)	50	0	0	0
Hiawatha Forest (Open Space)	365	0	0	0
Hager Park	104	0	0	0
Port Sheldon Natural Area (Open Space)	440	0	0	0
VanBuren Street Dunes (Open Space)	120	0	0	0
Spring Grove Park	16	0	0	0
Riley Trails	300	0	0	0
	1,606	0	0	823
Miles	7,257.8	8,489 1.6	119,333 22.6	84,271 16.0

River